

Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in the EU

Fundamental Rights Implications

Country: Lithuania

Contractor's name: Lithuanian Social Research Centre

Date: 24 March 2020

DISCLAIMER: This document was commissioned under contract as background material for a comparative report being prepared by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) for the project “Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in the EU – fundamental rights implications”. The information and views contained in the document do not necessarily reflect the views or the official position of the FRA. The document is made available for transparency and information purposes only and does not constitute legal advice or legal opinion.

1. Measures taken by government/public authorities

The Government of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the Resolution ‘On Declaration of State-Level Emergency (*Dėl valstybės lygio ekstremalios situacijos paskelbimo*)’¹ due to the threat of new coronavirus (COVID-19) on 2020 February 26. Furthermore, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania adopted another Resolution ‘On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania (*Dėl karantino Lietuvos Respublikos teritorijoje paskelbimo*)’² (further – Resolution) on 2020 March 14. The duration of the quarantine regime was set from 2020 March 16 until 2020 March 30.

Impact on free movement. The quarantine measures have had the impact on free movement. According to this Resolution article 3.1², entering the country for all non-citizens of the Republic of Lithuania is prohibited during the quarantine regime with exceptions of persons who have the right to reside in the Republic of Lithuania, drivers and crew members of cargo transport, diplomats, NATO military personnel and their families. Leaving the country for the citizens of the Republic of Lithuania is prohibited with exceptions of persons who come back to their place of residence, go to their workplace, or have special permission of State Border Guard Service at the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania. Number of international border-crossing points was reduced to 8 for road transport. Entrance of cruise ships to Klaipėda seaport was prohibited. Number of passengers in each public transport vehicle is limited. The movement of goods has not been not restricted. According to this Resolution article 3.1², persons who has come to the Republic of Lithuania from any foreign country must spend 14 days in quarantine isolation.

According to this Resolution article 3.2², work and customer services has to be provided remotely in government and municipal institutions. Emergency services must be provided as usual. Same recommendations were provided for business enterprises. All events and gatherings in open and closed spaces were prohibited. All cultural, recreational, entertaining, wellness services were prohibited, except individual rehabilitation services related to medical treatment. Hotels could be used for quarantine measures if needed. Restaurants, cafes, nightclubs, and bars were closed except those who provide take-away food. All stores and supermarkets were closed except stores for grocery, veterinary, pharmacy, optical goods, and online shops.

The Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the decree³ ‘On Adopting the Rules of the Isolation of Persons Infected COVID-19 Disease <...>’ (*Dėl asmenų, sergančių COVID-19 liga <...> izoliavimo namuose ar kitoje gyvenamojoje vietoje taisyklių patvirtinimo*) on 2020 March 12. According to this decree, individuals infected COVID-19 must remain in quarantine at their home or other place of residence and do not contact physically with other individuals for a period of 14 days. Same quarantine period is applied to individuals who are suspected COVID-19 or has had the physical contact with other individual infected COVID-19.

2

¹ The Government of the Republic of Lithuania (2020), Resolution ‘On Declaration of State-Level Emergency’, No. 152 on 2020 February 26. Valid from 2020 February 26 ([Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės 2020 m. vasario 26 d. Nr. 152 „Dėl valstybės lygio ekstremalios situacijos paskelbimo“](#)).
Vilnius

² The Government of the Republic of Lithuania (2020), Resolution ‘On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania’, No. 207 on 2020 March 14. Valid from 2020 March 15 (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės 2020 m. kovo 14 d. nutarimas Nr. 207 „Dėl karantino Lietuvos Respublikos teritorijoje paskelbimo“).

³ The Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania (2020), Decree ‘On Adopting the Rules of the Isolation of Persons Infected COVID-19 Disease (Corona Virus Infection), Suspected of Having COVID-19 Disease (Corona Virus Infection) or Having Been in Contact with COVID-19 Disease (Corona Virus Infection) at Home or in another Place of Residence’, No. V-352 on 2020 March 12. Valid from 2020 March 14 (Dėl asmenų, sergančių COVID-19 liga (korona viruso infekcija), asmenų, įtariamų, kad serga COVID-19 liga (korona viruso infekcija), ar turėjusių sąlytį su sergančiuoju COVID-19 liga (korona viruso infekcija), izoliavimo namuose ar kitoje gyvenamojoje vietoje taisyklių patvirtinimo).

The Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the decree⁴ ‘On the Isolation of Persons in Municipal Apartments’ (*Dėl asmenų izoliavimo savivaldybių administracijų numatytoje patalpose*) on 2020 March 23. According to this decree all individuals infected COVID-19, suspected COVID-19, and physically contacted with other individual infected COVID-19 has to be quarantined in municipal apartments from 2020 March 24.

Impact on access to health services. According to the Resolution on declaration of quarantine article 3.4², medical diagnostic services, elective hospitalisations, and surgeries are postponed with exceptions cases of emergency. Visiting of the patients in hospitals is prohibited with exceptions for children under 14 years old and patients with terminal illnesses. Provision of medical rehabilitation services is restricted.

Such measures taken by the government may impact disproportionately existing patients in critical conditions such as cancer patients. Member of European Parliament dr. Aušra Maldeikienė has published an open letter on patients right to health services to European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakidou⁵. According to dr. Aušra Maldeikienė ‘cancer treatment schedules and procedures are being affected’⁵ due to the disproportionate quarantine measures on COVID-19 in Lithuania. However, measures to avoid such impact were taken by the Ministry of Health. Health care services for cancer patients were classified as emergency services⁶.

Impact on access to social services and education. The quarantine measures have had the impact on socially vulnerable groups putting them in institutional isolation. According to the Resolution on declaration of quarantine article 3.2², visiting of prisoners and the arrested has been prohibited, except for meetings with the lawyers. According to the Resolution on declaration of quarantine article 3.4², it is prohibited to visit all inpatient social services, families, group and community homes. Contact with the client has been only allowed with the provision of essential social services. Activities for children, people with disabilities and the elderly are prohibited in day-care centres.

According to the Resolution on declaration of quarantine article 3.3², all educational activities in kindergartens, schools, universities, day care centres, employment centres and other educational institutions are suspended from 2020 March 16 until 2020 March 30². School holidays were announced in all public schools from March 13 to March 27. All educational activities in educational institutions has to be replaced by distance learning from March 30⁷.

NGO National Network of Poverty Reduction Organisations (*Nacionalinis skurdo mažinimo organizacijų tinklas*) has published an open statement⁸ to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and other public authorities. The main goal of this statement is to raise awareness about the impact of measures related to COVID-19 to the most vulnerable groups of society. According to this statement, individuals from lower socio-economic groups more often have poor health and much lower access to

3

⁴ The Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania (2020), Decree ‘On the Isolation of Persons in Municipal Apartments’, No. V-499 on 2020 March 23. Valid from 2020 March 24 ([Dėl asmenų izoliavimo savivaldybių administracijų numatytoje patalpose](#)).

⁵ Member of European Parliament dr. Aušra Maldeikienė (2020) open letter to European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakidou, published on [Facebook profile](#) on 2020 March 17.

⁶ The Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania (2020), Decree ‘On the Organisation of Work in Health Care Institutions During the Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania’, No. V-387 on 2020 March 16. Valid from 2020 March 17 ([Dėl sveikatos priežiūros įstaigų darbo organizavimo paskelbus karantiną Lietuvos Respublikos teritorijoje](#)).

⁷ The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2020), ‘Information Related to Coronavirus’ published on website on 2020 March 18 ([Informacija dėl koronaviruso](#)).

⁸ NGO National Network of Poverty Reduction Organisations (2020) open statement No. NSMOT 20/03/17/1 on 2020 March 17 published on its official website ([Dėl Lietuvos Vyriausybės svarstomo ekonominių ir finansinių priemonių plano visuomenės sveikatos apsaugai užtikrinti ir šalie ekonomikai skatinti](#)).

health services and medications. Therefore, individuals from the most vulnerable groups will be at the higher risk of COVID-19, will face some greater consequences of pandemics and limited access to necessary social and health services⁸.

Families with children from socially vulnerable groups may face negative impact of quarantine measures related to educational activities. According to the statement of NGO National Network of Poverty Reduction Organisations, learning process for children from households without computers and internet access may become inaccessible to them. Moreover, due to quarantine measures children from families of socially vulnerable groups will lose access to free meal in kindergartens, schools and children day-care centres. This problem was discussed in main news portal⁹ in Lithuania on 2020 March 19.

Quarantine measures such as kindergarten and school closures may have a negative effect on families with children, single mothers and fathers, in particular, who may have to undertake the mainstay of childcare responsibilities and work from home at the same time⁸. Working parents can get a sick-leave due to closures of schools and kindergarten but it could reduce incomes of self-employed parents. Due to quarantine measures some self-employed individuals and unskilled workers will face unemployment, downtime, and/or income reduction⁸.

The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania passed the package of legislative changes¹⁰ in order to improve economic situation of most vulnerable social groups and most negatively affected business companies on 2020 March 17. These legislative provisions will remain in force for the period of the emergency and the quarantine only. Legislative provisions guarantee a secured income for employees at least a monthly minimum salary for a quarantine period, introduce subsidies to business to preserve the jobs, prolong the duration and increase the amount of sickness benefits, introduce changes in finance and taxation such as postponement to pay the loan. The period of child sickness benefit for parents who have to stay at home to look after their children following the closure of schools has been extended until the end of quarantine. A sickness benefit has been introduced for persons caring for people with disabilities and grandparents in need of care following the suspension of the activities of day centres. The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Lithuania took measure to provide computers to households without ones in order to ensure distance learning for children from socially disadvantaged groups.¹¹

According to this Resolution article 5², it is recommended to cancel all religious ceremonies and public gatherings during the quarantine period.

2. Impact of the outbreak on certain national or ethnic communities

There have been no reports on official website of Police Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania¹² related to incidents of alleged discrimination on the grounds of nationality in access to goods and services, employment, healthcare and any other sector against since the beginning of the Coronavirus Covid-19 outbreak (01/02/2020-24/03/2020). Human Rights

4

⁹ Evelina Joteikaitė (2020), 'Quarantine had a negative impact on the poorest: children from socially disadvantaged families were left without warm food', 2020 March 19, *delfi.lt*. ([Karantinas kirto skurdžiausiai gyvenantiems: socialiai remtinų šeimų vaikai liko be šilto maisto](#)).

¹⁰ Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania (2020) website published on 2020 March 19 ([Kokią valstybės paramą gaus darbuotojai, darbdaviai ir prižiūrintys artimuosius?](#))

¹¹ The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2020), 'The Ministry of Education is buying 35 Thousands of Computers with Help of Business and Society' published on website on 2020 March 20 ([Švietimo ministerija išgys 35 tūkst. kompiuterių, taip pat prašo verslo ir visuomenės pagalbos](#)).

¹² Police Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania (2020) official website on 2020 March 20 ([Policijos departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos vidaus reikalų ministerijos](#)).

Monitoring Institute¹³ and the Lithuanian public broadcaster, Lithuanian Radio and Television¹⁴ have not reported any incidents of alleged discrimination on the grounds of nationality on official websites (01/02/2020-24/03/2020).

3. Impact on privacy and spread of disinformation

The State Data Protection Inspectorate of the Republic of Lithuania has released the statement¹⁵ related to the current situation due to COVID-19 on the institutional webpage. Information in the statement addressed employers, educational institutions, and other public and private sector organizations. This statement includes the information on what personal data can be processed due to COVID-19, whether personal data can be disclosed to public authorities for public health purposes, what actions should be avoided, and where to find additional information related to personal data protection and European Data Protection Board.

National media websites such as official website of Lithuanian public broadcaster, Lithuanian Radio and Television¹⁶ reported some cases of infected individuals (including names and organisations) and their health status. But there is no information that it was made without the permissions of infected individuals or with violation of personal data protection rights.

There is an initiative from Lithuania Debunk.eu¹⁷ (*Demaskuok.lt*) which counter the spread of disinformation online. It is uniting competing media outlets, journalists, and volunteers. Some fake news regarding COVID-19 were also disclosed during the period of quarantine.

¹³ Human Rights Monitoring Institute (2020) official website on 2020 March 20 ([Žmogaus teisių stebėjimo institutas](#)).

¹⁴ Information form official website of Lithuanian public broadcaster, Lithuanian Radio and Television ([Lietuvos Radijos ir Televizijos portalas internete](#)).

¹⁵ The statement released by The State Data Protection Inspectorate of the Republic of Lithuania ‘Personal Data Protection and Coronavirus COVID-19’ on 2020 March 13 on the official website („[Asmens duomenų apsauga ir koronavirusas COVID-19](#)“).

¹⁶ Information form official website of Lithuanian public broadcaster, Lithuanian Radio and Television ([Lietuvos Radijos ir Televizijos portalas internete](#)).

¹⁷ Debunk.eu Debunking disinformation together (2020) website on 2020 April 2 ([debunk.eu](#)).